

# OPINION

## TWO VIEWS: STATE VOTER INVESTIGATION

### Denying voting rights to eligible citizens is just wrong

By Glenn W. Smith

Those who actively engage in efforts to take voting rights away from U.S. citizens are simply not fit for democracy. Sorry to be blunt, but Gov. Greg Abbott, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, Attorney General Ken Paxton, that means you.

It is hard to understand how those who would suppress the votes of others rationalize their anti-democratic, Vladimir Putin-like behavior. Nothing is more sacred in a democracy than voting rights, and for years Texas GOP officials have soiled voting rights to protect their power and their pocketbooks.

Recently, Abbott and the others embarrassed themselves and the state of Texas with a scheme to knock tens of thousands off the voter registration rolls without cause. After comparing the voter rolls to driver's license records, they took a flawed number of people — 95,000 — and strongly implied that many of that number were registered to vote but were not citizens.

Secretary of State David Whitley immediately sent the list to the attorney general for investigation and prosecution, further implying that these people had violated the law.

The "report" from the Texas Secretary of State — an Abbott appointee who would not have acted without instructions from the governor — said some 58,000 people on that list had voted some time over the last couple of decades.

They didn't take account of the fact that a large number of those folks had become naturalized citizens and were registered and voting in accordance with the law. The list was sent to county voter

registrars with instructions to purge their voter rolls accordingly if citizenship couldn't be confirmed.

Then, of course, county officials discovered the list contained thousands of legitimate voters, many of them people of color who might not vote for Republicans.

The scheme has fallen apart now thanks to some attentive county election officials and alert journalists. But the revelations don't solve the deeper problem.

American democracy is now plagued with elected officials who no longer believe in it. To protect their power, they are willing to subvert it at every turn. To suppress the votes of fellow citizens is to sell out democracy.

It is, of course, part of a wider disease that's reached epidemic proportions in this era of Donald Trump and outspoken white nationalism. Racism is on the rise, and Trump is spreading it. Trump supporters like Abbott, Patrick, Paxton, U.S. Sens. Ted Cruz and John Cornyn have yet to oppose Trump's bigoted speech and acts.

They don't have to do bigoted things or say bigoted things to take advantage. Long before Trump, the Republican Party did what it could to appeal to racist voters. Most never contemplated that that "base" would one day control the party. Now that it does, however, none of the officials do anything to turn it back.

Destroying the voting rights of people of color, students and others who Republicans fear might oppose them seems so un-American that surely no American would do it. But, they do it. Aggressively, persistently.

*Smith is an author and director of Progress Texas, a political action committee.*

### One illegal vote is too many

By James Dickey

Voter fraud in Texas has always been a hot topic among Republicans and Democrats.

Then the news delivered by the Secretary of State's office in late January shocked the state.

The Secretary of State produced a list of tens of thousands of names of potential noncitizen voters on our voter rolls — thousands of whom may have voted in one or more election.

In recent days, the media has seized on the fact that counties have pared these lists down during the course of the their investigation. That, however, does not change the most important fact in this entire discussion, which is this: Each non-citizen who has voted is breaking the law and disenfranchising voters. Every single illegal voter reduces the impact of legal voters and erodes one of our most important rights: the right to participate in our government through our votes.

We applaud our state leaders for taking this issue seriously. Since this investigation was first announced, many on the political left have launched into attack mode against the Secretary of State and other state leaders for their attempts to ensure only verified citizens are voting in the state of Texas. After all, who can argue against the desire to ensure our elections are secure and reserved for those with the right to vote? Doing otherwise takes away indirectly the hard-won victories of the movements to ensure the right to vote for all legal age citizens of our great

republic. This is an issue that should transcend political party and result in both parties working in unison.

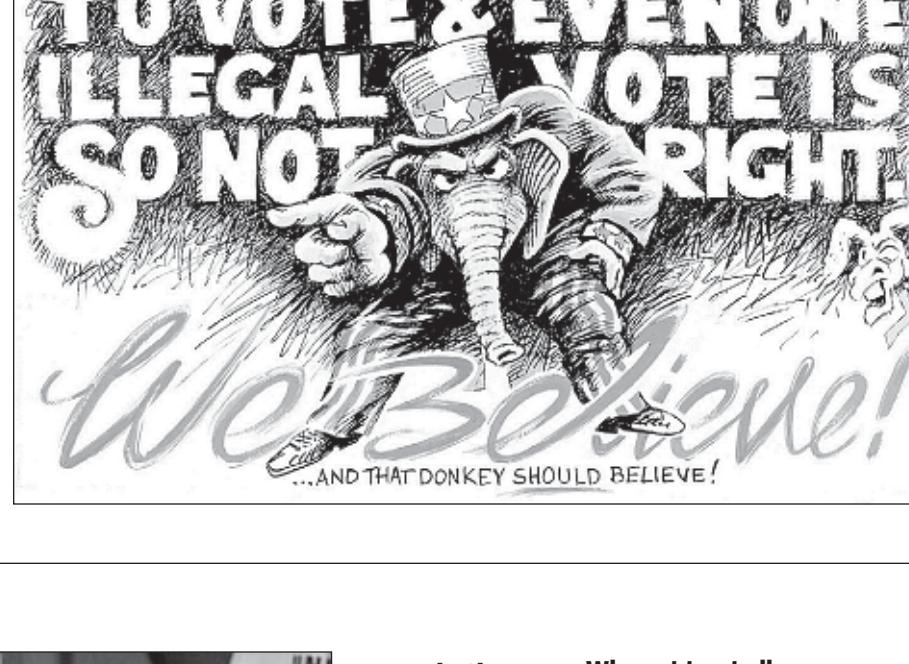
Unfortunately, this has not been the case. The immediate negative barrage against the effort to ensure that elections are fair and without fraud tells you everything about the state of politics today. We should all agree, without regard to political party or philosophy, that not one illegal vote should ever be allowed to disenfranchise a legitimate voter in Texas or our nation.

For years Democrats have argued that there was no vote fraud. Then some cases started be prosecuted and they argued that those were so unusual as to be irrelevant. Now they argue that the thousands of names recently flagged by the Secretary of State were over-reported. That is precisely why there is a process to offer the registered voters time to respond.

But it doesn't change the fact that Democrats continue to move the bar, showing by their actions that they do recognize that illegal votes are being cast in Texas. Now the only question is in what volume, and the responsibility falls on all of us to make sure that number is the smallest possible.

It is the goal of the Republican Party of Texas to ensure that every legitimate citizen is able to cast his or her vote with the confidence that it will have the impact it should in a properly run, legal, fair, and free election. We continue to work to make that a reality throughout Texas.

*Dickey is chairman of the Republican Party of Texas.*



## YOU SAY

### Leave room for trees and people to breathe

Re: Feb. 6 article, "City Council's Casar unveils ambitious affordable housing plan."

I realized with a start the other day that I've lived in Travis Heights so long (70 years, give or take) I can even see how much the oak trees have grown — and they're slow growers.

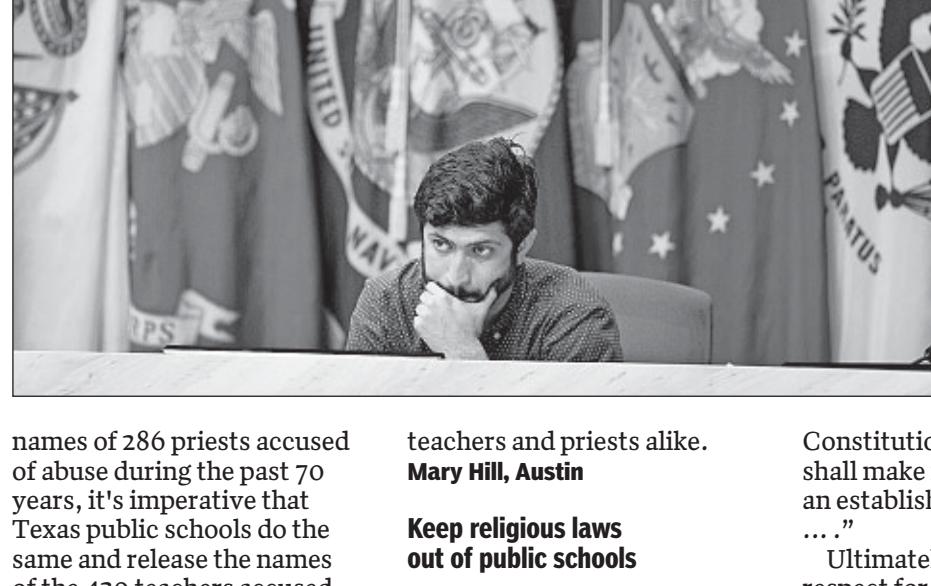
Our urban forest in Austin is amazing. There were once only a few streets completely overarched by trees, and now there are numbers of them, and they are beautiful.

These trees are the lungs of the city, and any elimination of compatibility standards or desertion of landscape ordinances to accommodate so-called affordable housing units will further degrade the air we breathe and undermine the reasons why we still love living in Austin.

**Connie Todd, Austin**

### Time to name teachers accused of misconduct

Now that Texas Catholic dioceses have released the



**Austin City Council member**  
**Greg Casar**  
listens at a June 2018 council meeting.

**JAY JANNER / AMERICAN-STATESMAN**

### Why not treat all people as equals?

Someone tell Rep. Bill Zedler, R-Arlington, that no one cares how you or conservative Christians believe. You are free to believe whatever you desire, but you cannot always act on those beliefs.

There was a time, not long ago, when conservative Christians believed that black people were inferior to whites and they acted on those beliefs to deny black people's basic rights. Go to a colored only bathroom, drink from a colored only water fountain and don't eat at a white's only restaurant.

The Free to Believe Act would actually allow Christian Conservatives to force their religious beliefs on others. Want a wedding cake, same sex couple? Not unless you believe like I do. Want to rent my house, transgender person? Not unless you live how my religion says you should. Why not just do as Jesus taught — treat people with love, dignity and respect.

**Lonnie Hazlewood, West Lake Hills**

names of 286 priests accused of abuse during the past 70 years, it's imperative that Texas public schools do the same and release the names of the 429 teachers accused of having improper relationships with their students during 2017 and also names of accused teachers from the preceding 70 years.

Fairness requires that the same standard apply to teachers as to priests: 70 years and specific names. Victims deserve equal justice from all offenders: school

teachers and priests alike.

**Mary Hill, Austin**

### Keep religious laws out of public schools

Re: Feb. 5 letter to the editor, "No confusion about the Commandments."

Would the writer be OK with Sharia Law being posted in our classrooms?

What about Hindu or

Buddhist laws?

I ask these questions because according to the

First Amendment to the

Constitution, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion ..."

Ultimately a child's respect for laws starts at home. Schools already teach The Golden Rule. If I want my children to learn a religion I can send them to a parochial school or take them to Sunday school.

Public schools should always

and forever remain secular.

**Kristi Cavazos, Georgetown**

# Austin American-Statesman

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